

BENHS INDOOR MEETINGS

12 October 1993

The President, Dr D. LONSDALE, announced the deaths of Mr F. Wright and Mr P. S. Crowhurst.

Mr I. D. FERGUSON showed a larva of the clouded magpie moth, *Abraxas sylvata* (Scop.). This was one of eight larvae obtained by beating at High Elms near Orpington, Kent. One larva had succumbed to a parasitoid, the other six had pupated. Colin Plant in *The larger moths of the London area* (1993) states that "any breeding populations of this attractive moth in the London area should be rigorously protected". Mr Ferguson also showed a sample of rice grains from his kitchen that had become infested with psocids.

Stephen Muddiman, John Bouscal Parker, Colin Leslie Grace, Derek George John Telfer and Christopher Robert Spilling were elected as members.

Mr M. Simmons said that a light trap at his home in Crowborough, Sussex, had caught about 20 species of moths on the previous Sunday night, 10.x.93, in spite of the heavy rain. Seventeen species had been taken on the following night including a specimen of the delicate moth, *Mythimna vitellina* (Hübner) (Lepidoptera: Noctuidae).

Mr M. OATES then spoke on the New Forest as it used to be and how it has developed during the present century. The talk was illustrated with colour transparencies and readings from contemporary accounts of the Forest in former times. Collecting insects became a popular pastime during the Victorian era when the development of the railway system made the Forest accessible to people living in London and elsewhere in Southern England. During the collecting season hotels in the main centres of Lyndhurst and Brockenhurst were heavily used by collectors and dealers, and local people found employment as guides and providers of livestock and pinned specimens. There was considerable rivalry between collectors and some ill feeling between them and the dealers, with butterfly aberrations being highly sought after.

In 1850 the Forest authorities passed an order aimed at controlling fallow deer and excluding them from the inclosures. In the following years their numbers were drastically reduced and the reduced grazing pressure allowed increased growth of the ground flora, with the rides becoming lined with brambles. Butterflies benefitted from the greater abundance of nectar sources and were present in prodigious numbers. 1888 was a superb year, with the hot summer allowing univoltine species to produce two generations. Even poor years during that period would be considered good by modern standards. Collecting trips could, however, be marred by the attentions of excessive numbers of biting flies.

The nature of the Forest was greatly changed by felling during the 1914-18 war. The 1923 Transfer of Woods Act resulted in the New Forest being handed over to the Forestry Commission in the following year. Their mandate was to produce commercial timber in order to reduce the nation's dependence on imports. Some conifer planting had been done in the Forest in the 19th century but this was greatly increased after the Forestry Commission took over. By 1937 the broad-leaved woodland had been reduced to 54%. Further changes took place during the second world war when parts of the Forest were used for airfields, bombing ranges and arable crops. Alder buckthorn was cut for making charcoal for gas masks. 1941 and 1942 appear to have been the last great years for butterfly aberrations in the Forest. The quality of the habitat and butterfly numbers were declining.

During the 1950s the Forestry Commission used heavy machinery to clear ditches and control vegetation in the rides. The fallow deer population was recovering

and grazing out the willow and brambles. In 1964 cattle, ponies and other livestock were allowed into the inclosures, adding to the grazing pressure. By 1970 about 70% of the Forest had been coniferized, despite a declaration in 1928 to keep a 60:40 ratio of broad-leaf to conifer trees. In 1982 a halt was called to the planting of more conifers and of felling mature broad-leaf woods. This ironically may have resulted in further declines, since the habitat provided by felled and replanted areas is now denied to those butterflies dependent on it. Although some good areas still exist, the New Forest today is largely poor for butterflies. Mr Oates showed slides of many of the butterflies recorded in the Forest, described their current status and outlined the reasons why many of them had declined.

In 1985 the Forestry Commission was given a new remit to encourage conservation in its forests. During the late 1980s it began replacing fences and gates but overgrazing remains a problem. Areas which have been cleared of conifers are less favourable for insects than similar clearing in broad-leaf areas. This is probably due to a reduction in the seed bank in the soil and increased acidification while under conifers. The application of conservation measures is being restricted by limited funding. The possibility of the government privatizing the Forestry Commission raises the interesting question of whether the New Forest would be better managed if it remained in their care, or whether it should be passed to another organization such as the National Trust.

9 November 1993

The President, Dr D. LONSDALE announced the death of Mr P. W. Cribb.

Dr D. LONSDALE showed a live specimen of the orange ladybird, *Halyzia 16-guttata* (L.) found on 9.xi.93 on a poplar in an experimental plot at Alice Holt Forest, Hants. This is a widespread species, having been found as far north as northern Caithness, but this was the first occasion the exhibitor had seen it at Alice Holt. It is one of a few British ladybirds that feeds on fungi, such as mildews, rather than preying on aphids.

Mr S. MILES drew the meeting's attention to some recently received publications produced by the Department of the Environment, the Joint Nature Conservation Committee, and non-governmental organizations in response to the Rio Conference on Biodiversity. Also on display were minutes of a recent meeting of the Joint Committee for the Conservation of British Invertebrates, together with a report on the Committee's activities by the National Trust's representative. Mr Miles also displayed a copy of a report by Wildlife Link on the future ownership of Forestry Commission woodlands. Mr Softly asked if a summary of these reports could appear in the Society's journal. The President thought that editors were able to make use of this material. Mr Miles invited members who are interested in forming a conservation action group to contact him.

There then followed a report and discussion on the Society's 1993 Annual Exhibition. Mr M. SIMMONS said that the Exhibition had been well attended with numbers of both members and visitors slightly up on the previous year. The number of exhibits compared favourably with previous years, with Coleoptera being particularly well represented. Mr D. HACKETT suggested that name badges should be issued to people attending. As a new member he would have found it helpful in locating exhibitors of insects which were of particular interest to him. Mr R. MORRIS noted that the space allocated to Diptera and Coleoptera had been somewhat cramped. The President raised the topic of the format of exhibits; he personally

preferred exhibits that gave additional information about the insects' biology or ecology. The Exhibition notice had been reworded this year to discourage the showing of long series of insects taken from a site in one season. A discussion took place on the practical application of this ruling with reference to some of the exhibits shown at the Exhibition.

Various members then showed some of their slides.

Dr J. MUGGLETON showed slides taken during a visit to the Sierra de Grados mountain range in Spain in June 1993. These depicted various wild plants, including narcissus, paeony, dwarf lupin, *Lavandula stoechas* and *Endymion hispanicus*. The invertebrates included various beetles, crickets, the local stick insect *Leptynia attenuata* found in a new locality, the mantid *Empusa pennata*, a centipede, and some termites found under a rock. After crossing the border into Portugal, Dr Muggleton also photographed a large solitary wasp, probably *Scolia flavifrons*, that had alighted on a car window, and a mating pair of grasshoppers that were superbly camouflaged against the stony ground.

Mr R. SOFTLY showed some examples of the lesser yellow underwing moth, *Noctua comes* ab. *sagittifer* Cockayne taken at light on the Isles of Scilly, together with a specimen close to this form taken at Hampstead Heath. He also showed photographs of the dark spinach, *Pelurga comitata* (L.), a species not in the Agassiz list of Scilly Lepidoptera, and an as yet unidentified form of an *Idaea* sp. A typical larva of the chamomile shark, *Cucullia chamomillae* (D. & S.) was compared with an example found on Scilly. It was almost entirely white and was photographed feeding on the white flowers of mayweed where its coloration gave it excellent camouflage.

Mrs F. MURPHY showed slides of various spiders and plants seen on a visit to the Côte Sauvage, France, in the summer of 1993. In the previous autumn she had visited Singapore and Queensland, Australia, where she photographed various plants, spiders, lizards and green tree ants. She closed her display by showing slides of members taken at the Pelham-Clinton building at Dinton Pastures on 20 September 1992.



Members at Dinton Pastures, 20 September 1992. Left to right: Tony Pickles, John Muggleton, Peter Chandler, Ian McLean. Photo: F. M. Murphy.



Dinton Pastures, 20 September 1992. While passers-by look on bemused, Roger Morris searches unsuccessfully for the spider *Nuctenea sclopetaria* (Clerk), webs of which were seen on the bridge balustrade. Photo: F. M. Murphy.

Mr N. A. CALLOW had visited eastern Nepal in March and April and showed slides of the area, including butterflies drinking from wet mud and *Primula irregularis* in flower at the snow line. This was followed by photographs taken mainly in Britain of a wide range of insects, spiders, wild flowers and birds. Some of these illustrated insect behaviour, such as brown ants attending black aphids, a dolichopodid fly drinking from a water droplet and a solitary wasp, *Symmorphus* sp., flying off with a figwort weevil larva, *Cionus* sp., clasped in its jaws and front legs. He showed a series of photographs taken of two slugs, *Arion ater* (L.), feeding on a dead earthworm, which was also being eaten by a social wasp. A black ant nearby appeared to be threatening the wasp, which was responding by whirring its wings.

Mr D. HACKETT showed a slide of the buprestid beetle *Agrilus pannonicus* (P. & M.) photographed on oak bark near its characteristic semicircular emergence hole. This beetle has become widespread in NE London in recent years. Also shown were slides of the purple hairstreak and the white-letter hairstreak butterflies taken in the grounds of Alexandra Palace. The former is local in London and Alexandra Palace is a new site for the white-letter hairstreak. The remaining slides were of an *Orthosia* sp. larva on buckthorn, a larva of Blair's shoulder knot, *Lithophane leautieri* (Boisd.) on a *leylandii* hedge and a drinker moth, *Philudoria potatoria* (L.) recently emerged from its cocoon.

14 December 1993

Mr A. J. HALSTEAD showed a live queen *Dolichovespula media* (Retz.) (Hymenoptera: Vespidae) found 5.xii.93 in a wood at Knaphill, Surrey. It was one of two found separately hibernating on the undersides of logs on the ground. The queens of this species, which was first recorded in Britain in 1981, presumably require hibernation sites with a high humidity if this is a typical situation for this species.

Mr R. A. JONES showed the local hoverfly *Scaeva selenitica* (Meig.) found sunning itself on a pine trunk at The Chart, Limpsfield, Surrey, on 18.xi.1993. This large, scarce hoverfly was previously regarded as solely a migrant, but is now considered to be resident, having been recorded as breeding here. When

found, the glossy black of the abdomen and contrasting yellow bands were very bright, suggesting that the specimen was freshly emerged rather than freshly blown from abroad.

He also showed several specimens of *Carpophilus sexpustulatus* (F.) (Coleoptera: Nitidulidae) found under fungoid beech bark at Knole Park, Sevenoaks, on 15.xi.1993. Several *Carpophilus* species are cosmopolitan, and are regularly introduced into Britain in stored food products. Such was the case with this species at the turn of the century, when only two (imported) specimens were known. By the 1930s it had been found out of doors, although only very rarely. It has since spread and although not very common is recorded across a wide range of sites, often in abundance. In Knole Park on this occasion it was very common under bark infected with *Bulgaria inquinans*, the black bulgar fungus also known by the delightful name 'rubber buttons'.

Mr C. B. ASHBY showed a home-made slide viewer which accommodates six 35-mm transparencies side by side above a light box lit with a small fluorescent tube. Above the transparencies was a lens mounted on two rails so that it could be slid along to view each slide in turn. The device is particularly useful for comparing similar slides in order to select the best exposure and image. The slides used to demonstrate the viewer were of Roesel's bush cricket, *Metrioptera roeselii* (Hagenb.). This species has become more widespread in southern England in recent years and the slides were taken at a recently discovered site at Cherry Orchard Farm, Ewell, Surrey, where it was discovered by Dr I. Menzies.

Mr R. SOFTLY showed a live sawfly larva (subsequently identified as a *Dolerus* sp.) that had crawled into an actinic light trap he had been running recently in his garden at Hampstead. The larva had been feeding in captivity on the leaves of pendulous sedge, *Carex pendula* Hudson, a plant that was growing near the trap site. The majority of sawflies overwinter as non-feeding prepupal larvae in the soil and subsequently pupate during the spring.

Mr R. UFFEN said that he had also recently found a sawfly larva feeding on *Carex*. It appeared to be a different species to that shown by Mr Softly.

The following persons were elected as members at the December Council meeting: Stephen Hallam, Peter G. Kelly, Michael Dockery, William G. Kittle, Michael E. New, Nigel L. Sawyer, Stuart W. Campbell, Thomas D. Sleep, David B. Spencer, Anthony P. Pittaway, David F. Lloyd, Bernard Verdcourt, Charles Watson, Brian J. Warne, David John Slade, Stuart P. M. Roberts, John Derek Baston, Brian Eversham and Adrian Barnes; the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (Scotland) was elected as a corporate member and James Brian Prout was elected as a life member. Existing members Ken Merrifield and Henry S. Barlow have converted from ordinary to life membership.

Mr R. HAWKINS reported that the hoverfly book had been reprinted and was now available again.

Dr J. ISMAY then spoke on the subject of an entomologist in Papua New Guinea, where he had worked as the only insect taxonomist with the Department of Agriculture between 1980 and 1986. He showed a series of slides to indicate the variety of habitats found on the island, including mangrove swamps, agricultural activities ranging from plantation crops to mountainside smallholdings, rain forest and hill tops. The fauna of Papua New Guinea was depicted with a series of slides of frogs, lizards, snakes, crabs, millipedes and centipedes, spiders and a wide range of insects. Many of these are larger and more colourful than their British counterparts. Dr Ismay closed his talk with some pictures of the native people in ceremonial dress. These costumes involve the use of large numbers of bird of paradise feathers.